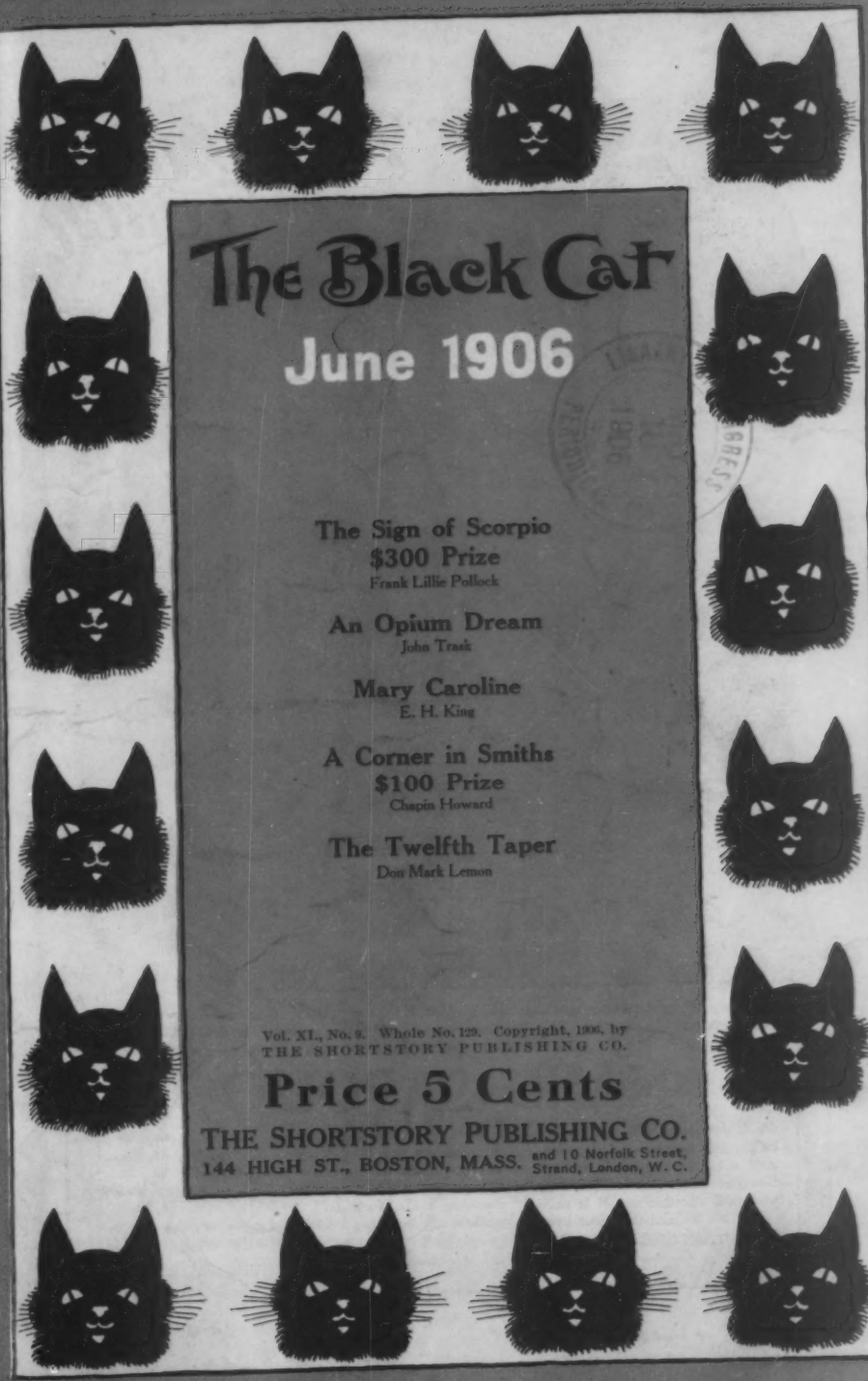

The Black Cat

June 1906

The Sign of Scorpio
$300 Prize
Frank Lillie Pollock

An Opium Dream
John Trask

Mary Caroline
E. H. King

A Corner in Smiths
$100 Prize
Chapin Howard

The Twelfth Taper
Don Mark Lemon

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for it develops both the tint and the texture of the skin. It gives quality as well as color, and art instead of artifice. A thousand soaps, and you still need the unique action of Hand Sapolio to remove the dead skin of an outgrown complexion and to liberate the new. Hand Sapolio gives more than cleansing; it gives energy and vim and circulation. It is called "the soap with life in it."

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The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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The Sign of Scorpio.*

BY FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK.

NEKOOSA'S unkempt main street was filled with whirling clouds of rich prairie dust as Reaumur came out of the little post-office with his hands full of mail. Dusty and dejected-looking horses, bearing high-horned saddles, were attached to hitching posts here and there in front of the stores, along with equally dusty farm wagons, but there were few persons in sight. Reaumur viewed the spectacle with deep dislike. Looking either way along the street he could see clear out of the town and into the country, where there was nothing but miles of brown dusty stubble and barbed wire fences. Overhead a torrid Nebraska sun burned in a cloudless sky. There is a peculiar melancholy in the stagnant after-harvest season anywhere, but in the flat corn country it becomes melancholia and madness.

The architecture of Nekoosa consisted largely in sheet-iron painted to look like wood, and wood painted to look like stone, and small buildings with naïvely undeceptive false fronts. To Reaumur the whole place seemed to have the air of a just-detected

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cheat. This was partly because he had lost more money than he could afford in an abortive boom, and partly because it takes a long time to learn to love the flat country. Reaumur had been bred among hills. Four years ago he had come west from Massachusetts, and ten months ago he had come from Montana to Nekoosa to assist in the editing of the Nekoosa *Journal*, which was to become a daily with an enormous circulation when the boom should be on. Alas! it was still a weekly, and Reaumur still helped to set up advertisements in his spare moments.

The *Journal* office was a large and rather dingy room over a grocery store. Its floor was ebonized with ink, and littered with proof, copy paper, exchanges and clippings. Similar matters were pinned on the walls, along with a few political portraits, a large war map, and an even larger map representing the city of Nekoosa as it was to have been. At one of the two desks sat a large-built young man with an aggressive face, who was smoking a cigarette and reading a St. Louis paper. This was Ryan, the chief editor and owner.

Reaumur sat down at his own desk, and began to sort out the mail, opening some of the letters and papers and tossing others across to his chief. Most of them were for the *Journal* impersonally, but he came unexpectedly upon one that bore his own name. It was postmarked Boston, and was addressed to Cheston Centre, Mass., but it appeared to have travelled over a great part of the West, for the envelope was covered with forwarding addresses. He looked at it dubiously for a moment. and then slit it open. It contained a folded five-hundred-dollar bill, and nothing else.

Reaumur appeared less astonished at this acquisition than might have been expected. He scrutinized the handwriting on the envelope, and then examined the bill closely. It was not soiled nor crumpled, yet did not look new; and on the back was a curious diagram drawn in red ink, that looked like a crude attempt to represent a spider. He glanced at Ryan, who had observed nothing, and after an instant's reflection he put the envelope and money in his pocket, and calmly continued to open the mail.

When he had finished he leaned back and looked through the dim windows. Beyond the houses he could see the dusty stubble

running to the rolling horizon. He knew that he might travel far in any direction without seeing anything else, and he was filled with deep depression.

"Jimmie," he said suddenly. "I'm going home."

"Home? I didn't know you had any," returned the editor, continuing to read a letter.

"I mean, back to the strip of civilization along the Atlantic coast. Come to think of it, I've got a house there, in Massachusetts, a big old red brick house, with hollyhocks in front and apple-trees at the back. It's stood empty for four years — like my pockets. But look here, —" and he produced the big bill and the scribbled envelope.

"This is the fourth I've received — one every August since my father died. Not a word ever enclosed with it, but the envelope always addressed in his hand."

"But you said he was dead," said Ryan, taking the bill to look at.

"So he is. He must have fixed these up, and arranged to have one sent to me every year, so that I shouldn't absolutely starve. He was always troubled about my future, and I don't blame him. He wanted me to settle down in Cheston Centre and get married, and I always wanted to try something somewhere else. I always supposed that he was a rich man, you know, and I never expected to be hard up as long as I lived."

"What's this red thing on the back?" enquired Ryan, still examining the bill.

"I don't know. I never could make out. It's been on every one of the bills I've received. It looks like a spider, or a crab."

Ryan handed the bill back. "And wasn't your father rich, after all?"

"Why, yes. Not a millionaire, you know, but prosperous. He had been a clock-maker in the Tyrol, and he came to this country, started a shop, and worked up a big business. There used to be Reaumur clocks in every house in the pie belt. I know he used to hope that I'd take hold of the business after him, but when I wanted to study medicine he sent me to Harvard without a whimper. I got my diploma, and he wanted me to practise in Cheston Centre, but I dropped into newspaper work in Boston, and then

went to New York, and then drifted round to a good many places, much to the poor governor's disgust. But, anyhow, I'm glad that I went home and spent the last year of his life with him. It seemed to cheer him up. Then he died."

"And you came in for the clock factory?"

"No, he had sold the factory a couple of years before, when he grew too feeble to manage it himself, and when he saw that I'd never take any interest in the thing. He must have blown in the whole proceeds of the sale. From what I could gather, he had been buying stocks. Anyhow, when the estate was settled up there was nothing coming but the house and furniture — and the clock.

"That was no ordinary clock. My father had amused himself in building it by hand, and he had been at it for nearly three years. It was six feet high, made of carved ebony, and it marked the hours, minutes, seconds, days of the week and month, changes of the moon, signs of the zodiac, and I don't know what else. He was offered $200 for it, but he loved it like a second son. He used to get the observatory time by wire every day from Boston, and the clock never varied a second.

"He left that clock as a solemn charge to me. 'Carl,' says he to me one day shortly before he died, 'I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed. You'll have to start poor, as I did. I've had misfortune lately, and things have gone wrong. But I want you to promise to take care of that clock. Never sell it, and keep it always going. It was the last thing I made, and some day you'll be glad to hear it tick, and to think that your father put the life into it.'

"Of course I promised, but I thought that his mind had maybe failed a trifle. But when the estate was settled I found that all I had was the house, the clock and a couple of thousand dollars in the bank. My mother had been dead for years. There were no other relatives. There were no other legacies. I got all there was, and I was almost glad that my poor father had gone before he came to the end of his cash.

"I thought I'd go to Boston to live, and get into newspaper work again. But the clock bothered me. It weighed about four hundred pounds, and you can't ship a delicate thing like that in

a freight car. But at last I had it hauled there in a sleigh, very slowly, and it never lost a tick, and I had it set up in my flat.

"I was editing a small magazine for a while, but the magazine went to pieces, and I couldn't find anything else. I heard of a good opening in Chicago, but there was that confounded clock anchoring me down. It was out of the question to think of taking it West with me. I didn't see how I was ever going to be able to move about or go anywhere. I saw that for the rest of my life I was bound to be a kind of dry nurse to that time-piece.

"Well, I went back to Cheston Centre and took the clock with me in a sleigh again. I thought that I might go in for medicine there after all, because everybody had liked my father well enough to want to give his son a chance. But it was no use. I couldn't stand the idea of a life there. Then — well, I did what I've been ashamed of ever since.

"I cleared out to Chicago, and left orders to have everything sold that I owned. It was done. Everything went, clock and all, except the house itself, which wouldn't bring any price. The proceeds were sent to me, and when I got the check I thought I had done with Cheston Centre.

"I needn't go into my doings since then, for I've done a little of everything. But when I got the first of those five-hundred-dollar bills, with my dead father's writing on the envelope, it gave me a shock that I won't try to describe. I came near going home and back to the life he'd wanted me to live. I wish I had. I'm going to do it now. I've had enough of the West, and I'm sick of being batted around from one State to another. I want a peaceful bit of life. When I look at this cornshuck country and think of the old gardens back East it makes me homesick."

"You wouldn't like it long," remarked the editor. "You've eaten too many tamales to go back to doughnuts."

"No, this is final. I hit the road no more. Hunt for another assistant, Jimmie."

Ryan grinned sceptically, but Reaumur was really in earnest. He went to work to prepare for departure with the same feverish energy that had attacked him so often before when to get away from a given place seemed the most desirable thing in life. He settled all his affairs, sold out his town lots for nothing, com-

pounded with his debtors, and took the Burlington express East, leaving Ryan, who had refused to the last to believe in his going, confounded on the platform.

He crossed Missouri, Illinois and Ohio without stopping, and when he saw the blue mountains in the east it seemed to him that he was approaching home. The thought of the century-old gardens of New England was delightful to him, indeed, but he had other matters of more weight upon his mind, of which he had said nothing to anyone. A great deal of the three days between Omaha and Boston he spent in wondering whether Margaret Austin were married — whether, in fact, she were yet alive — for he had heard no news from Cheston Centre for nearly four years.

They had been children together; they had grown up together; he could scarcely think of Cheston Centre without thinking of Margaret, and the nearer he came to Boston the more her image occupied his imagination. She had never been exactly beautiful, but her face, rather dark, had a singular delicacy and purity of line. Her mother was dead; she lived with her father, a retired Congregational minister, and by Reaumur's latest knowledge she was teaching in the public school for a very insufficient stipend. She had been a great favorite of his father, and Reaumur felt sure that he might have married her, at one time, if he had chosen. He had let the chance slip; he had not realized its value. Was it too late to recover it?

He reached Boston on Friday night, and stayed there over Sunday, constantly preoccupied by this problem. He was unable to take pleasure in the queer, crooked and narrow streets of the New England capital, and on Monday morning he took the earliest local train out of town and got off at Cheston Centre.

Deep quiet settled down upon him as the train rattled out of hearing and left him standing on the little station platform. The sun shone through an autumn haze. Grass was growing on the long street, and every green shutter was closed on the white-painted houses. As he walked down to the hotel there seemed no sound except the buzzing of the locusts from the shady and neatly kept gardens. It appeared a place of slumber, except where at the other end of the village he could see the tall smoking chimney of the clock factory, now operated by a Boston company.

He postponed making any dangerous enquiries about the things which he wanted to know, and spent most of that forenoon in examining into the state of his house, which he found in an atrociously dilapidated and mouldy condition. Several persons had recognized him, however, and the news of his return spread fast through the village. When he appeared on the street next he was stopped and greeted on every side, evidently with more curiosity than respect, for he had come to be regarded by this time as a rolling stone of the most mossless sort. He was dextrously interrogated as to his past doings and future intentions, but, being himself New England bred, he was able to evade these questions and even to elicit some information for himself. He learned that Margaret Austin was still in the village, that she still taught in the school, that she was still unmarried.

That afternoon Reaumur strolled aimlessly and anxiously about the streets, looked at the clock factory, battled with inquisitive old acquaintances, and kept an eye on the schoolhouse gate. School was dismissed; the children emerged with grateful shrieks, and at last he saw her come out also, carrying a little black bag. He was almost astonished at the thrill when he caught sight of the slight figure in black, and at the perturbation when he went to meet her.

He had expected to take her by surprise, but she recognized him half a block away, waved her hand, and greeted him with unembarrassed delight.

"I saw you this morning through the school-room window as you came down the street," she explained. "I knew you at once. Then I heard at noon that you'd come back. But you've changed," she went on, looking at him inspectingly.

"I don't think you have," he replied, returning the look.

"Oh, nothing ever changes in Cheston Centre," she said; and certainly Margaret had not changed. She looked just as she did when he used to come home from Cambridge for the vacation; her voice still dropped into the occasional naïve drawl that always used to amuse him; and as they fell into the old sort of familiar chat it was hard for him to realize that he had passed four years and so many thousand miles since the last time he had seen her.

"I suppose you're only here on a flying visit," said Margaret,

with the very slightest hesitation, as they approached her own gate.

"That depends," Reaumur answered. "You ought to know what I've come back for," he hazarded, after a moment's consideration whether this would be premature.

"I?"—with a little face of mock surprise. "Oh, you must come in, of course," as he stopped at the gate. "You'll probably be in Arizona to-morrow, and father hasn't seen you."

There was a familiar perfume in the hall from a jar of pot-pourri that had stood there ever since he could remember. She left him alone in the sitting-room for a little, while she took off her hat. Her father was not in at the moment, but in the silence it seemed to Reaumur that he heard an even more familiar voice. It came through the half opened door into the dining-room. It was almost impossible; yet it seemed unmistakable. He listened, and at last peeped through the door. He had not been mistaken. Between two windows, and facing him, stood the tall ebony clock, that should have been the most sacred part of his inheritance, ticking monotonously under its dial charged with figures and strange astronomical symbols.

Margaret came back and found him staring through the doorway, and she flushed a little with the first embarrassment that she had shown.

"I knew it!" exclaimed Reaumur. "I couldn't mistake that tick. How on earth did you get it?"

"I bought it — at the sale," she answered, in a defensive tone.

Reaumur recollected that it had brought $140. He knew what a terrible percentage this was of her small salary.

"I knew how your father valued it, and I didn't want to see it go into the hands of strangers. Besides, I'd always wanted that clock myself," she went on. Reaumur, thus reminded of his own defection from duty, did not know what to say.

"You must have thought me an awful brute, Margaret, to go off and let everything be sold up that way," he blundered.

"No, not at all," she interrupted nervously. "I knew, of course, that you must have had good reasons. You couldn't tie your life down to Cheston Centre. I just wanted the clock, and I bought it. Besides, I knew — you told me yourself — what

you'd promised — that it should always be kept in good order, and going."

"Well, you've kept my promise for me, if I didn't," said Reaumur, half bitterly.

"I didn't blame you, Carl; don't think it. I knew how such a thing must hamper you. I understood better than you imagine. So I thought that I would help you a little if I could — keep the clock for you till you came back. And — don't you see? — I couldn't like to think of your breaking your word to your father."

Reaumur made a half unconscious step toward her. "Margaret!" he began, ineffectively.

"It's never stopped," she went on, looking away from him. "I've had it corrected by Boston time every week. Carl, don't come near me, or — I — shall — cry!"

She fled into the dining-room, where she sat down upon a sofa, buried her face in the cushions, and did cry. Reaumur hesitated, in deep abasement; then he followed her, approached her, and tentatively touched her hair. It is the perpetual miracle of man that even in such moments of humiliation, when he might be expected to prefer to creep into an obscure corner and be silent, he finds the assurance to ask a woman to love him; and it is the perpetual miracle of woman's magnanimity that she sometimes does it.

And the great clock continued to tick solemnly above their heads, registering the hours and the changes of heavenly phenomena, and recording this hour as indifferently as the rest, though it was worthy of being marked with a celestial sign of its own.

Reaumur spent the next month chiefly in repairing and refurnishing his house, and preparing for an extended residence in Cheston Centre. Money was not plentiful with him, but his western amplitude of ideas caused a popular report that he had accumulated a vast fortune in Colorado, and was going to buy back the clock factory. That he was likely to marry Margaret Austin was more than a rumor; it went as an accepted fact. Reaumur had said not a word; neither had Margaret; but the air is telepathic in Massachusetts.

He was also making quiet preparations to start a medical practice, but he did not spend all his time in business. He em-

barked on little holiday excursions with Margaret, whose life had lately been sadly bare of such festivities; and when the theatrical season opened they went down occasionally to Boston to see anything that happened to be particularly good. They did this almost every week, generally dining in town, and returning by a convenient train that set them down in Cheston Centre about midnight.

They had made one of these expeditions on the 9th of November, and it was just midnight when they reached Margaret's gate on their return. The clock was striking inside the house as they came in hearing of it. Twelve times it struck slowly, but it did not stop at that. It went on, — thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, till they lost count, and until it seemed that it was never going to stop at all.

Margaret unlocked the door, and Reaumur went in with her for a moment to investigate this aberration of that accurate time-piece. It was still striking when they entered the room. Margaret struck a light, and they both glanced at the clock. An unsuspected slit had opened just below the dial, and the end of a white paper was showing. Reaumur pulled it out, cautiously, and the clock at once ceased its alarm.

It was a large white envelope, and Reaumur saw to his astonishment that it was directed to himself, and in a familiar hand. On one corner was a drawing in red ink that resembled a spider or a crab. He ripped it open. There was a letter within. He showed it to Margaret, who was looking on with a flush of excitement.

"Read it," she said. And Reaumur read it aloud:

MY DEAR CARL:

If you receive this letter I am sure that it will be in Cheston Centre, for you could scarcely have carried my clock about with you in the aimless sort of life that I was sorry to see you seemed disposed to prefer. By this time I hope that you will see the wisdom of my attempt to anchor you as best I could.

It should be the ninth or tenth of November, 1902, when you read this. The sun is then in the sign of Scorpio, and I have arranged the clockwork so that this letter will be thrust out when the hour hand touches the figure XII. at the same moment as the zodiacal hand reaches the centre of the sign of Scorpio. This will occur in five years, if the clock is kept running accurately, — otherwise never.

You will have forgiven me, I hope, for the slimness of your legacy. I really dared not hand over all my money to you, with your unsettled ideas, as I should have liked to do. However, I have arranged with

my lawyers to have a banknote mailed to you annually for five years, and I hope you took the hint of the sign of the Scorpion drawn on the back.

My lawyers are my old friends, Behring & Sturm of Boston, and the proceeds of the sale of my business are deposited with them. With the accumulated interest it will amount to about $148,600. They will hand it over to you, if you present the enclosed order in person. The order will not be honored if presented by any one but yourself, and, in case you do not claim it, half the money will go to the Polytechnic Institute and the other half to Miss Margaret Austin, if she is still living.

By the time you read this, if you ever do, you will have well-nigh forgotten your old governor, but think of him occasionally and as kindly as you can.

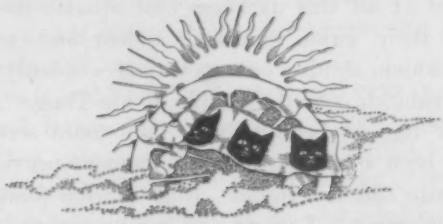
Your affectionate father,

RUDOLPH REAUMUR.

Reaumur's voice was not altogether under control as he read this singular document.

"I can't take it!" he declared, remorsefully. "I cheated my poor father, alive and dead. By every right it belongs to you, every cent of it."

"Very well," said Margaret, looking fixedly at the clock. "I don't see that it makes any difference."



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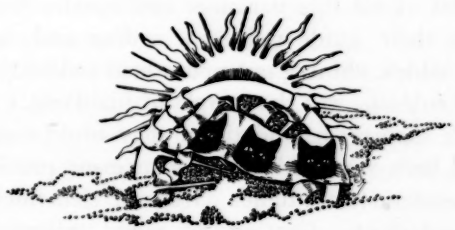
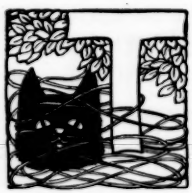


An Opium Dream.*

BY JOHN TRASK.



HE smell of the somniferous essence of the poppy came out from under doors, between partitions and through cracks of the dark, tangled, dirty maze of tenements connected by dim alleys, unlighted steps and mysteriously unexpected passages, through which the party seeing Chinatown that evening, of which young Wayne Carter of Chicago was a member, were being led. Young Carter had not passed the appreciative age, and it was his first visit to New York. He had never seen anything of the kind before, and found it fascinating, absorbing every detail of the place of which he had so often heard, with interested Western eyes. The walls along which the party groped their way were black and musty, and their heels ground, here and there, on bits of the plaster that was dropping piece by piece, at intervals, from the ceilings overhead. An old spectral cat, toothless and well-nigh hairless, screamed at them from a landing at the head of one of the shaky flights of stairs.

In the midst of all this darkness and squalor the old Chinaman who was their guide unlocked a door and ushered them into the room which, shining out upon them suddenly like a jewel in a waste of rubbish, was the temple of his Tong. As he closed the door, with dignity, behind them, they could scarcely believe that they had been surrounded, but a moment previous, by anything but incense and soft lights. Rugs of rich thickness hushed their steps, underfoot. Lanterns of rarest teakwood, overhead, shed a harmonious effulgence through the place; embroidered Eastern stuffs adorned the walls. Divans and chairs of carved ebony were ranged, for the worshippers of the temple, around the three sides of the room, and in his niche in the fourth sat the

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great Buddha, resplendent in his gold and coloring, looking down through the dim, perfumed silence at the altar with its pyramids of votive painted rice-cakes at his feet. The old Chinaman, Won Ling, who, as a friend of the prominent importer at whose house young Carter had been calling, had offered to conduct them, promising to show them a little more than parties through China-town are usually shown, had withdrawn a little from them and stood watching, as they gazed about in admiration, with pride in his aged almond eyes. Having taken them the round of the shops, the restaurants, the theatre — ushering them with ceremony, at the latter, into his own private box, a box in very truth, made of rough boards nailed against the wall and covered with strips of carpet from which the ladies instinctively drew away their skirts, —he had finally brought them here. The English in which old Won Ling pointed out his colony's attractions had been fluent, and his manner, in spite of his coarse dress, stamped him of the higher class. "I left this until the last," he said.

Miss Dalrymple, dark-haired and bewitching, the niece and ward of the importer, on whose account young Carter was in New York and with whom, ever since her first visit to Chicago, he had been desperately but hopelessly in love, moved over to his side. Her uncle, while welcoming the young man as a guest, had set himself against the match for reason of an ancient family misunderstanding; but with Muriel Dalrymple, as with young Carter, opposition fanned the flame. Their attitude in the absence of the uncle, as on this occasion, bespoke community of interest in all things, great and small.

"He says it is the last," she whispered with an air of disappointment, "and I thought we were to see the opium smoked!"

Won Ling, who had overheard her, smiled.

"In good time, young lady," he assured her, "in good time," — and drawing aside a curtain in the niche behind the altar waved them toward another, inner place, the fleeting shadow of a twinkle alone betraying his enjoyment of their surprise.

"It is there," he informed them, with a nod toward the outer room, "that the Tong Ling pray. It is here they smoke!"

The party, standing in the doorway revealed to them by the sudden sliding of the curtain, peered before them in amaze.

Behind the very back of Buddha, with its divans, its opium lamps and pipes and cushions, was in truth a smoking-room.

"Enter," the old Chinaman invited courteously, "and let me make you tea." He seated them, as they followed him, on bamboo stools, and from another curtained recess produced, as though by magic, a tray of fragrant, steaming bowls, such tea as, shining through the mandarins and kiosks on the egg-shell cups, China knows how to keep for Chinamen alone; moving among them, as he dispensed it, with silent, graceful tread. Won Ling, when all were served, placed his stool by that of Miss Dalrymple, with an inclination of his head in the direction of young Carter who had taken up his station on the other side.

"Your estimable uncle," he said, holding his cup to the light, "has often drunk with me from these, and we have talked together here of many things. It is," he continued, glancing with a smile about the chamber, as though to remove any misinterpretation of it in her thought, "a room for the polite and friendly intercourse of gentlemen, a parlor without reproach.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as a young man, a pale and sparkling-eyed Celestial, appeared suddenly in the curtained doorway, rising, at the same time, to conduct him into their midst, "here is my friend, Wah Lee, whom I have invited to show you how we enjoy the poppy in high life!"

From the time of his entrance to that of their departure from the place hidden like a strange surprise in the heart of the maze that was about them, the interest of the party centered in the young Chinaman alone. Having dropped his slippers by his couch's side and reclining among its cushions, waxen-faced and fingered, and with eyes unnaturally brilliant, with the abandon no one but the Oriental knows, he wove a spell about them that was dissipated only by their return to the dark corridors and stumbling steps without. They knew themselves — when, languidly applying the bowl of his long pipe to the flame of the lamp that was beside him, he was lost to them in the absorption of the influence that slowly and yet with a sluggish insistence filled the chamber, — to be in the veritable presence of the poppy's slave. The far-famed odor of the opium — dreamy, heavy, and yet penetrating, unlike to any other, permeating every corner and seeming to creep tangibly

about them in the wreaths waved by the smoker from his pipe — left the majority of them in a curious state of wonder as to whether it were welcome or unpleasing. Miss Dalrymple began to look a little wan, and old Won Ling nodded at her reassuringly through the haze. For once young Carter was oblivious. He sat staring, fascinated, at the figure on the couch, unable to take away his eyes. All that he had seen that evening seemed to have been shaping itself about one centre, without which the experience would be incomplete. He was overcome with the desire to test the experience for himself.

A diversion in the outer room as they were leaving, the pausing of the party to buy some little ivory souvenirs from the temple attendant, a half-grown Chinese boy, who alternately snored and blinked on one of the benches by the wall, and the continued attention of Won Ling to Miss Dalrymple, whom he seemed intent on pleasing, gave young Carter his opportunity to do what he did — which was the combined result of his youth, his Westernism, and the novel circumstances of the night. He was not missed until his friends, having parted with their guide, were well out of China-town, and it was supposed that they and he had lost each other at some turning and that they would hear from him later on. Until time had been allowed him to communicate with Miss Dalrymple it was decided to send out no alarm.

Slipping back into the room covered by the curtain, while the rest of the party, bantering and laughing, dickered with the half-awake attendant, young Carter, when the temple-door had been heard to close behind his friends, took possession of the couch vacated by Wah Lee. Holding the precious dark brown bead on his pipe's bowl to the flame of the lamp, he was thrilled with satisfaction to see, despite his awkwardness, the smoke-puff issue from it, and to smell the dense narcotic fragrance that rose anew into the air.

He had purposed, somewhat indistinctly, owing to the necessary haste of acting on an impulse, to make but a short trial of the opium-smoker's feelings and then rejoin his party with a confession of his escapade to the non-Celestial members, hoping to come up with them at one or another of the shops at which they had said they meant again to stop. But finding the couch comfortable,

the light from the gently-swaying lanterns overhead seductive, the situation unique and his occupation undeniably engrossing, he made a somewhat longer trial of it than he knew. When he attempted to get up he found to his not unpleasurable wonder that it was impossible. Rolling over to the side of the couch next the wall he laid hold of one of the draperies that hung above him, attempting to pull himself up by it, and pulled it down upon him. It covered him completely and he said to himself that after a while — after a great while, he consoled himself for the effort of the thought — he would throw it off. Through a slight loop in the fold that had fallen across his face he was able to look out, and he discovered that the room had become a most peculiar room. Round globes of light moved slowly but unceasingly, as if on unseen pulleys, up and down the walls; clouds of wondrous, varying colors, green, pink, purple, gold and azure, passed slowly through the air, and underneath the lanterns hanging overhead, gleaming dully through the pleasing and confusing mists, a dark object, he could not say what, circled round and round. Somewhere from a great distance, a thousand miles or so away, a bell rang and rang; and he knew that, no matter how tired he might grow of watching or of listening, the dark object would continue to circle and the bell to ring, and in weariness closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, after swaying dreamily and in a most soothing manner, for a thousand years or so, in space, a key, which did not in the least disturb him, turned in a lock. The curtain of the door that led into the room in which he lay was pushed aside and three persons came through the clouds into the place — whose floor he now discovered was no floor, but the green waves of a sea. Congratulating himself that he was safely on a couch, he saw the three persons seat themselves on bamboo stools that rocked upon the waves. One of them was Won Ling, in such embroidered and amazing garments as no one would have dreamed that he possessed, and with a hat turned up at the corners like a pagoda-roof; another was a younger Chinaman, likewise gorgeously arrayed, with a moustache turned down like that of gentlemen on canisters of tea; the third a large American in a blue suit and brass buttons, whose nose was red and who carried a blue cap with a white band, which he twirled in his hand.

The man in the blue suit glanced around the room, but the old Chinaman shook his head.

"No one comes in here," he said contemptuously, "who has not received a key."

Their conversation was difficult to follow, seeming to have very little meaning, and young Carter only waked to gather it in scraps. At one time they appeared, as their stools bobbed up and down, to be having a dispute. The whole face and neck of the man in blue was red, and the young Chinaman pulled the ends of his moustache. "It has been a matter of great inconvenience to us," the old Chinaman remarked, "that the ship has not sailed before."

The colored mists, half-concealing, half-revealing, continued to drift between himself and them, and again, looking most ridiculous as they leaned toward one another, the stools at the same time frisking and cavorting dangerously, he remembered what they said because he was kept from going to sleep by waiting to see if their heads would touch.

"The cask which contains the merchandise," Won Ling, the top of whose hat alternatingly towered upward in a smoky column to the ceiling and resumed its usual shape, said to the man in blue, "will be at the dock, then, tomorrow afternoon at half-past one. My son and I will see that it reaches you in safety. It will be on a dray with other casks and you will know it by its size. It should be carried carefully aboard."

"But what if the merchandise," the man in blue responded, "should have anything to say?"

"The merchandise," Won Ling returned, "will have taken a pill which will do away with the desire for speech until you are out of the reach of such ears as would hear. It is well that Far Low should learn the value of silence and of meditation, for the Tong Ling will give him time and place to meditate in China."

Carter was very thirsty and thought of asking Won Ling to snatch an opportunity when his hat was normal and dip it in the sea that he might have a drink; but though he watched it for some time it still continued smoking and he again went to sleep.

When in the gray dawn, dull in eyes and head, Carter let himself out of the door which, having a modern lock in spite of the surrounding savor of antiquity, opened readily from within, pick-

ing his way down through the yet sleeping tenement and out into the street, it was with a feeling of thankfulness to find himself again in the fresh air and of disgust with his prank which appealed to him as both risky and childish in the light of day. His retreat from the place still haunted with the absurd visions he had conjured with the opium-pipe had been easy, owing to the fact that the temple-boy was deep in slumber. Hoping against hope, as he found his way to Broadway and took a car uptown, that he had not thrown his friends into commotion by his callow escapade, perhaps causing a search for him to be set on foot, he determined, after seeing Miss Dalrymple, to apologize by letter to them all.

Miss Dalrymple was already up, when he reached her uncle's stately residence on Fifth Avenue at half-past six, and herself answered his ring at the bell; and it is doubtful if, had a hundred uncles been her witness, she would have been deterred, in her release from her anxiety, from doing what she did. Young Carter, her pretty head on his undeserving shoulder, manlike put off the evil moment of confession which might cause it, instead, to be shaken at him in disapproval, allowing his disappearance to be for the time accounted for in the way in which she thought; although, being entirely honorable, he meant to tell her the truth about it before he left the house. Ushered in by so tender and favorable an opening they passed several delightful hours together in the morning-room, during which time all considerations of lesser value sank into their place.

"Muriel," young Carter told her, as they sat talking of a happiness which, for them, seemed to lie very distant in the future, "I am going to see your uncle again this afternoon. I shall tell him that in three years, on the day when you are twenty-one, we will be married, and convince him that there is nothing to be gained in making us waste three years!"

She looked at him with earnest eyes and shook her head.

"You must not do it, Wayne," she said. "He has made up his mind. And now would be the very worst time in the world to do it, for he has had a great loss in his business and is like the bear with the sore head. The Chinese expert who has tested all the Eastern imports, for years, has mysteriously disappeared, and there is no one who can take his place. It has crippled every-

thing. I cannot tell you what it means. Won Ling has worked so faithfully to find him that my uncle thinks of taking his son into the place — although neither he nor any other man, can do the work. So you see, especially now — !" She lifted a smiling, wistful face, to see a strange expression on her lover's.

"Muriel," he cried, "then Won Ling *has* a son?"

"And the Chinese expert," he demanded, springing to his feet and catching her by the shoulders before she could find breath to answer, "was his name Far Low?"

"What do you know about it?" she gasped. "Yes, it is Far Low."

With a joyous "Wait!" that left her in amazement young Carter was on his way downtown.

That afternoon at half-past one, when a dray containing a large cask, with others, moved heavily in the direction of the dock from which the ship that was sailing for China that afternoon was about to weigh her anchor, it was met by the importer, young Carter, and several keen-eyed gentlemen in plain clothes who were not expected and who had been waiting unnoticed among the other standers-by upon the wharf. The expert, Far Low, brought to light by a few strokes of the hammer on the big cask's head and transferred from his cramped quarters to the larger comfort of a coach, slept off his pill in the safety of a quiet bedroom in the house of his employer, and when "the desire for speech" returned to him confirmed, to the petrifaction of all who heard it, the treachery of old Won Ling and the plot by which he was to have been exported and imprisoned on the other side that the son of Won Ling might be put into his place.

Young Carter, who had laid down a condition before he made known the whereabouts of the lost Celestial, revealed to him by the opium-dream which was not all a vision, was not obliged, as it is well known, to wait for Miss Dalrymple for three years. And so it was that he came to bless rather than deprecate the prank of a night which both gained for him his wife and provided him with a story of never-failing interest to tell in his declining days.

Mary Caroline.*

BY E. H. KING.

ARY CAROLINE stood in the door of a low shack on a broad mesa and watched a boy trail over the open and on into the clean patch of ground around the steps. Inside the room a woman moved back and forth, casting a glance, now and then, at the girl.

"Come in here, Ma'y Ca'line, an' shet that do'," she called at last, as she rose from bending over the fire where a three-legged pot of corn-meal mush was spluttering. "Come in, now, yo' hear me? You're a-comin', so yo' might as well come, now!" The woman's voice was drawling and inclined to come through her nose.

Mary Caroline went on watching the boy, who wobbled, and stumbled, and fell to the ground; then he bravely rose and dragged himself on for a few more paces; at last he fell prone against the flat rock step, his outstretched hand touching the rough shoes on the girl's feet.

"Oh, Lordy! Run here quick, mammy! Some'n's fell right on the step!" cried the girl, then she stooped to brush aside the limp hand that lay against her foot, and leaped over the prostrate form on to the ground beyond. There she stood waiting for her mother, her back bent ready to help lift the boy into the sheltering shack.

"Land-o'-Goshen! Take right a-holt, honey, an' le's git him inside!" cried the woman, as she ran forward with the mush-paddle in her hand, dripping hot mush over the floor and over her apron. Then, suddenly realizing that she had it in her hand, she threw it from her as she stooped and slipped her arms about the thin body of the boy. Together the woman and the girl dragged him into the room and lifted him upon the shake-up in the corner.

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"Like's not somethin's happent. Run shet th' door, quick, honey."

As the woman straightened the limp form, that it might rest easy, she spied the frayed and soiled end of an envelope sticking from his shirt. Then, with an eye on the girl as she closed the door, she seized it and thrust it in her bosom, and as Mary Caroline came softly across the board floor toward the bed, she was twisting the damp wisp of hair that fell on his brow.

"Seed 'im afore, honey? Mus' be stranger in these parts."

Mary Caroline merely shook her head. The flaxen hair, falling over her ears and the sides of her face, gave her an oddly uncanny look.

The woman made no heroic efforts to bring the unconscious boy to himself; instead, she covered him with some quilts and a goat's skin, until, from a casual glance, the shake-up might have been empty. Then she busied herself at the fireplace and from a shelf above it she took an old-time tea caddy which she shook two or three times. Then she removed the lid and sniffed at the mouth with the nose of a connoisseur, and with exactness measured the lid full of the powdered tea and dropped it into the old cracked teapot standing half sides over on the uneven rocks that formed the hearth. She now stood watching the heavy iron tea-kettle that had replaced the mush-pot, and when it sang the Song of the Tea-Kettle she poured the bubbling water over the tea, and left it to steep.

With a saucer in her hand ready to pour out some tea she said:

"Ma'y Ca'line, jist you look an' see ef thar's nobody a-crossin' th' mesa," and as the little tow-colored head was again shaken in the negative, she turned out a saucerful of the fragrant tea and hastened to the side of the shake-up, and laying back the quilts said: "Swaller this here tea, boy, an' you'll feel a sight better." She put her hand under the boy's head and held it up that he might drink. Half conscious, he rose on his elbow as she placed the saucer to his lips, and gulped the liquid with a greed that showed he was almost famished. He fell back when the last drop was gone, his half-closed eyes rolling about him.

"Whar you come f'm?" the woman questioned as she pulled the old quilt straight over his chest.

"Cross t'other side. They've — they've ketched him — an' —" and he shuddered, burying his face in his arm.

"Nev'r min', now. Jist lay down an' res' yo'se'f. An' then I'll give you a plate o' mush — an' when you git some vittles inside you — you kin tell me then."

The boy ate ravenously of the coarse mush and washed it down with the last drop of the "store tea" from the old cracked tea-pot. Then he slept. Slept as a strong, but exhausted nature demanded. And while he slept the woman sat in the back door of the shack and read the letter she had found in his shirt. She studied it out with great difficulty, then turned back to the beginning and read it a second time, mumbling the words to keep them in her mind. A third time she read it. Then she rose, her limbs cramped from sitting long in the same position, and placed it again in the boy's shirt bosom.

Then, when night fell over the mesa and rested heaviest on the sides of the hills, making it seem a place too beautiful for anything but love, and the light of love, the woman and boy crossed to the other side and cut from a swinging limb the body of a strong man, — strong, but emaciated and thin as was the frame of the boy. They scooped a hole in the soft earth beneath the sighing pines, and hid there, away from the sight of man, the thing that dangled in the wind and the moonlight. Hid it from the eyes and the reach of prowling, hungry wolves. Then, without prayer, or spoken word, they trailed again to the other side, leaving the spot covered with the moss and the pine needles in the care of the All-Seeing Eye. And when they stood again in the door of the shack the woman said:

"Reckon you hain't no kin hereabouts?" Her eyes were reaching out into the distance down the plains beyond the mesa.

"No, I got no kin, now."

Then the boy was given a skin and a quilt and he stretched himself on the floor in front of the door.

"Don't let it keep you awake, sonny," whispered the woman as she lifted her tousled head from the shake-up in the corner, and turned her eyes toward the restless boy lying with the moonlight covering him like a blanket of snow. The night air streamed through the open door and into the darkened room.

"I jist cain't help it," came the weary tones of the boy. But after awhile he slept, and when the woman watched him still and at peace she rose and crept out through the door, looking up to the hills, and reached her gnarled and knotted hands and arms to the other side, but, when the morning sun took the place of the moon-beams and lay like a blessing on the pale face, she lifted the boy and laid him on the shake-up, covering him heavily with skins.

"Now, Ma'y Ca'line, jist slip on yore petticoats an' run-long down to the spring, an' tote me a buckit o' water while I rake up the coals."

When the breakfast of "briled chick'n" and soda biscuits was done and keeping hot by the fire, she went to the pile of skins and quilts, and shaking it, said:

"Sonny, sonny, come if you think you kin swaller a mo's'l o' vittles, git up an' set aside us. We got right smart o' eatin', Ma'y Ca'line an' me."

She watched him eat, but said nothing. There was nothing to say. And when he had feasted until his eyes wished for no more she told him he'd better rest about the house for a few days. Hunted, tired, and heart-sick, the boy was glad of this haven where he could abide for even that short space.

When the third day after the trip across the other side had passed, and no one had come to the shack with news concerning it, she slowly remarked:

"Now, sonny, I hain't pestered you 'bout nothin' nor nothin' hain't bin told 'bout nobody. Was it hosses?"

"It was hosses." Then the thin lips closed for a moment, but the eyes, with the ever-hunted look, sought the blue ones of Mary Caroline, and with a childish quiver of his chin, he went on: "I'll be movin' along ef you're afeerd for me to stay long of you. He told me out thar under the pines, ef he got cotcht to hang roun' for awhile; then I was to read the letters he give me — an' foller my feelin's arter. I got them letters." He laid his thin hand on his poor excuse for a shirt and pressed it close to his scrawny body.

"Well, I reckon as nobody'll pester you now, it's bin three days. An' ef you're a-goin' t' stay anywhars, you might's well stay right 'long o' us. I tuck up this here section, all on account

of my health, which was middlin' pore, an' it's bin the makin' of me an' Ma'y Ca'line. She was monstrous pindlin' down in Tennessee, but she's perkin' up right smart, an' she hain't missin' no schoolin', cos the schools wan't nothin' to speak on in our parts. S'I'll jist keep th' ranch goin' an' you kin holpen me right smart ef you wantter." It was a long speech for Mary Caroline's mother, but she had said all there was to say, and to the purpose.

He wanted to. He helped the woman with her truck patches and went to town for the letters and the papers that came from down in Tennessee. Time went on, season after season. The pine trees had dropped their long, slim needles, covering the shallow grave many times over while the boy waited. At each thought of journeying on, he looked into the blue eyes of Mary Caroline and asked:

"Do you love me, Ma'y Ca'line?"

At first she would nod her tow-colored head and push her face down on his shoulder, — for he always had his arms around her when he asked that tender question, — and wind her little arms about his neck. She was but a little child; but after awhile she grew too big to be gathered in his arms, and he would stand at arms' length and let the invariable question dart at her like an arrow from a bent bow. And at the nodding of the tow-colored head, he tarried yet longer.

At last the time came when she was growing fast toward womanhood, as girls will do. Then she would tease him. Intuitively she knew her power over him, and when once he stood even a greater distance than his arms' length and let the question fly at her on an unexpected occasion, she looked into his big eyes, now no longer hunted and sad, but filled with an abiding love, and gaily laughed.

"Why, la me, Jack, what a funny feller you sure are. Time an' time you ask that same thing. Reckon you mus' be forgittin' along as you grow bigger an' bigger — 'r else — " she dropped her eyes at the glow in his.

"'R else' I jist maybe wanter hear you say 't more an' more."

Jack took one step closer to Mary Caroline, but she fled like a wild animal.

Yet the time came when Jack must go.

He saw a notice in one of the Nashville papers that made him stop whistling and gaze soberly and long at the sun dropping down behind the hills, casting its colored lights over the clouds and the mesa.

"Time's up. I reckon I gotter go."

Then he went a little nearer to Mary Caroline and whispered the question that had filled his life since he found comfort and peace in the shack on the mesa. His voice was more like the twittering of birds in the trees at night, than his own clear, vibrant tones. Again she laughed.

"Forgot agin, Jack!" but she ran into the low old shack and laid the knives and forks on the bare old table and set the plates alongside them. Then she seized the bucket and leaped down the sloping path and brought some water from the spring. She expected Jack to follow, but he did not. He was busy training a vine against the side of the weather-beaten walls of the place that had been home to him, the only home he could remember, for, since his earliest childhood, he had been a wanderer on the face of the mountains with the man who had lain for so long under the pines.

The shack had taken on pretentious looks under the hands of Jack during the time he had been there, with Mary Caroline and her mother. A leanto had been constructed against the hill side of the house for his own bedroom. The walls of the whole were almost covered with the skins of wolves and mountain lions. A few more cattle had been added to the little herd; the truck patches were larger and more productive. A hop garden in the rear of the shack gave accumulative additions to the small income of the ranch. All these things went to prove to Mary Caroline's mother that a man about a place was a mighty good thing, even if he were a mere boy. And now that he was going, ruin seemed staring her in the face.

. . . . . .

Jack had been gone two years and a half.

Mary Caroline wore her skirts to her shoe-tops; her tow-colored hair was two shades darker, and was done in a knot on the top of her head, something like the styles she saw in the Nashville papers — and a certain natural air of womanhood had settled

upon her. She worked hard in the truck patches and the hop garden — Jack's own particular innovation — and helped with the cows and the calves. But, no matter how hard she worked, she always found time to stand for a moment in the door, looking down over the mesa, and across the plains, just about the hour that Jack had first trailed, weary and starving, and dropped his tired body at her little feet. And, once in a while, the two, the mother and the girl, would cross to "t'other side" to see after the spot under the pines. And at each visit it lay deeper and deeper beneath the pine-needles. This they had faithfully promised Jack they would do.

"What you gappin' at, Ma'y Ca'line?" called the mother as she untied her sun-bonnet and dropped on a chair at the supper table, standing in the middle of the room. She was tired and worn. "Come on, now, honey, 'r supper'll be gittin' cold arter you done got it, an' ef thar's a thing Ah jist nache'ly hate it's cold supper arter pickin' hops all day. Them hops do keep on a-spreadin' an' a-spreadin' till it seem like they'll over-run the whole hills —"

"A man's a-trailin' the mesa, — an' he's a-comin' this-a-way —"

"My lan', you don't say so," and the supper was forgotten, for the woman stood by the side of Mary Caroline, with her hand to her eyes, watching the figure hurrying over the long, level stretch before them.

As he struck the open just in front of the shack he tossed up his hat and took long leaps to the patch of cleanly raked ground around the steps and gathered Mary Caroline into his big, strong arms. But just as he was about to kiss her she slipped from him and ran through the shack and took to the woods behind it.

"I declar, ef that don't beat my time o' day, Jack. 'T wan't so when I was gal an' lived down in Tennessee. La, but we-alls uster think heaven itself hung above Tennessee — But I be downright glad to have you back. Come right in an' set to supper — she'll be back d'reckly for she' bin a-watchin' the road you fu'st come ever sense you went off by the same. Here, help youse'f, an' make youse'f to home." The woman was glad to have Jack back. She told him how hard it was to keep things as he had laid

them out, and was so interested in the sound of her own voice that she did not see Mary Caroline until she sank in the chair beside her.

Then when the two, Jack and Mary Caroline, trailed cross to "t'other side" he took her hand in his and asked, daringly, bold, and with the fire of a new nature:

"Ma'y Ca'line, do you love me?"

"There, you forgot agin," and she pulled her fingers from his and told him of the hard winters when he was away, and how she had fed the birds that had no place to rest their tired wings from flying always in the wind, — the dreary wind that blew and blew and sang through the trees until she sometimes felt it really was some one lost in the woods. And that one night she and her mother had risen and trailed through the snow drifts to "t'other side" for fear the earth would be swept from the place under the pines, and they piled heaps of brush and limbs of trees over it; so strong their promise to him was in their minds.

Jack asked no more questions of Mary Caroline during the summer on the mesa, but when he watched her his eyes were full of the love he gave her. He saw the new manner settling womanlike over her, and he stood aside to see her grow as he had done when he planted the first crop of hop vines. He loved to watch them rise from the ground and see them twist, and reach out their long, pale-green tendrils and, swaying, catch on to the poles he had set for them, and then how almost joyously, the fast-running vine spread and covered the poles with a sea of green leaves and savory blossoms. So, now, he followed each new movement of the girl he had loved since he first knew her. He watched her and left her alone.

One evening he told the mother of the people of Tennessee. Told her of the man who had married his mother for her money, and when, after he found he could never gain it for himself, had taken their child, — Jack — and fled the country, determined that even he should not have that for which he had sacrificed the woman he did love. He told her also, that he had learned the name of a woman with whom he had broken faith for the love of glittering gold.

"And now," he said, "if I could but find that woman, for they

say she has gone into the great West and is swallowed up in the cavernous maws of the mountains — ".

"Whatever'd you do, boy, ef you did find *her?*" The woman was almost breathless with emotion.

"Tell her that he did not do the thing for which he was — "

"Who done it, boy?"

"The man who loved my mother and who took his revenge by circling round him like the buzzards do the dead, till he saw him — "

"'Tain't no use a-goin' furder." Then she told him that she knew him by his resemblance to his father, and that she took the letters and read them, and it was for the love of other days that she went with him to hide that father even from the eyes of the Lord, if possible. On that first trip to "t'other side" she had dragged her heart through all the throes of a woman's abiding love, without sign, or sigh, or tears, and she thought never to tell her woe to anyone.

But Mary Caroline was never to know.

She had married that other man, the one who had rounded up the father of the boy, and after the birth of Mary Caroline he had deserted her, and she had sought the West to bring Mary Caroline up away from the haunts and ways of the other world.

. . . . . .

It was longer than twice two years before the blue eyes of Mary Caroline were made glad again at the sight of a man trailing the mesa, and crossing into the open before the cleanly-raked patch of ground in front of the low shack. Then she turned and would have hidden her joy in the skins against the wall, but he came so quickly that as she laid her head against the long, gray face of an old wolf, he caught her in his arms crying, and his voice was vibrant and clear:

"Ma'y Ca'line, do you love me?"

She shook her head in the negative, so long had she been deceiving herself, and tearing away from him, fled the shack.

Then it was the weary old mother came and stood before him.

"Ef you love her, Jack, win her an' stay true. But, ef you want gold instid, leave me an' my Ma'y Ca'line alone on the mesa, an' go."

"Stop right there!" he cried. "Who stood by me when the hand of God, almost, was against me? Who was the first who lifted a voice of sympathy for me? It was she for whom my heart has been crying all these years — "

"But, my Ma'y Ca'line ain't of the sort you got to be sence you bin goin' f'm us — "

"She only do I love, thou mother."

Again when the three went "t'other side" and looked on the spot beneath the pines, Jack asked:

"Ma'y Ca'line, do you love me? I love you," and when she was silent he took her in his arms and told her he had come to stay in the hills with her, if she would let him.

Then she looked up and nodded her head in the affirmative.

A Corner in Smiths.*

BY CHAPIN HOWARD.

HE advertisement was absurd, of course, and yet, I argued, many a stranger word than "Smith" had proved a man's "Open, Sesame" to Fortune. Moreover, I could not afford to be too skeptical. I had been out of employment for a month, tramping doggedly through a labyrinth of city streets, and growing more haggard and shabby with every day. My slender store of money had dwindled from paper to silver, from silver to a few coppers which I jingled occasionally in my pocket in a vain attempt to keep up heart. I was hungry — almost desperate — and in a position where I caught at straws.

I took up the paper and read the paragraph again:

> **OF ADVANTAGE TO BACHELORS NAMED SMITH.**
>
> This announcement to appear simultaneously in the leading newspapers of the country. I desire to communicate something of great advantage to all bachelors named Smith now residing in America. Absolute identification required. Full particulars on application. Call or address J. SMITH, 1199 Algonquin Ave., City.

There was an undeniable fascination for me about those few lines of print — a fascination which common sense seemed powerless to dispel. For a long time I sat staring at them thoughtfully. Then I cut the paragraph from the paper, extinguished the lamp, and started resolutely down my five flights of stairs.

It was eight o'clock of a rather bleak November evening when I found the house bearing the number which I sought. Its impersonal, dignified air of wealth was at first sight disconcerting, although wholly in keeping with the fashionable neighborhood in which it stood. For a moment I felt my resolution waver, as I paused with my foot on the lowest step of the brownstone flight. I was half ready to turn back. Then on a sudden impulse I walked

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confidently up the steps and touched the bell. An instant later I was admitted, without formality, by a liveried servant who showed me into a large, softly-lighted hall.

There were three Smiths ahead of me. They sat uncomfortably, at distrustful intervals from each other, upon a low, cushioned bench which ran along one wall. The first was evidently a tramp, the second, with his bedraggled white tie, might once have been a minister, while the third was unmistakably a Jew.

"Frauds," I decided instantly, and seated myself at the extreme end of the bench, conscious that I was being inspected with furtive curiosity.

We were not kept waiting long. One by one my three companions were led by an impassive-faced butler through a doorway on the right, and after varying intervals, reappeared dejectedly and were shown out, while I sat with my teeth clenched to keep from shivering under the eyes of the silk-stockinged giant who stood guard over me in the hall.

When my turn came I found myself in a large, sombre-hued room which, from the massive simplicity of its furnishings, might have served as an office or a library. A plump, middle-aged little man, with the frank eyes of a boy and all the solemnity of a judge, was seated at a desk, and as I entered he glanced me searchingly up and down. Then he rose impulsively and held out a plump little hand.

"The first honest-faced man to come through that door to-night!" he exclaimed feelingly.

"And therefore probably the greatest rogue," I returned, smiling.

But he shook his head at me gravely.

"I invariably read a man at sight and I rarely make mistakes. Sit down, if you please, Mr. Smith, and let us talk."

He resumed his own seat behind the desk, and I took the chair which he had indicated. For several minutes he eyed me keenly across the litter of papers without offering to speak; then he began abruptly.

"You are here, of course, in answer to my advertisement in this evening's paper. Will you be so good as to tell me what you thought of it?"

"It seemed rather unusual," I ventured, taken completely by surprise.

"'Unusual'—yes, it may easily have seemed that; but perhaps it struck you as fantastic or—ridiculous?"

He was still watching me intently, leaning forward in his chair, his hands playing nervously with a pencil, his eyes narrowed.

I shook my head emphatically.

"I realize perfectly," he continued, excitement trembling in his voice, "the danger which I run of being misunderstood and ridiculed. But that is something which great men have never been afraid to meet."

He rose suddenly to his brief height and struck the desk a blow with his clenched fist.

"I have made up my mind the race of Smiths must *stop!*"

The suppressed fury of his tone was startling.

"All my life," he went on, passionately, "I have been tormented by that name. No matter to what heights I have tried to rise it has been like an Old Man of the Sea about my neck dragging me down to the commonplace level of my fellow-men. Although a young man, you have had to suffer from it, too. You can understand me when I say I'd willingly give every dollar that I own for the right to bear one of those names which stamp a man as a born aristocrat. But I have been tormented long enough. Now that I suddenly have the power I mean to turn and cripple the thing that has kept me in obscurity—I mean to spend the rest of my life in cornering the name of Smith."

He began to pace excitedly up and down the room as he unfolded to me this astounding scheme.

"It is something which cannot be realized in a day, but I must be content to work for coming generations. I intend to bequeath to my grandchildren a name which shall be unique in all America—the name of Smith!

"There are at present, as you doubtless know, some sixty thousand persons bearing it. Of these, we'll say, one-half are males, of whom in turn one-half are bachelors. I will settle upon each bachelor five thousand dollars, provided only that he take his oath to remain unmarried, while to the single women I will give doweries of lesser amount to encourage them to marry and change their

name. Thus, in three generations, the Smiths will be practically extinct."

"But the thing is incredible!" I gasped. "There will be enormous difficulties."

He made an impatient gesture, seeming to brush aside any objections I might raise.

"'Enormous'—yes; but not unsurmountable. I have gone over the details very carefully. To some persons, of course, I shall be obliged to offer more—to others, less. In your own case, for instance,"—he swung round on his heel and looked me critically up and down—"I should offer but two thousand dollars."

I drew in my breath sharply. In my present circumstances even that meant wealth.

"And if I refuse?" I suggested—"If I should ask much more?"

He bowed ironically. "I should put you at the extreme end of my list. We might find your children more moderate in their demands."

I bit my lip. To refuse the offer would be folly, for it meant a temporary solution of my difficulties, and the prospect of marriage was not immediate to a man who had not the money in his pocket to pay for a square meal.

"What is there for me to sign?" I asked.

He handed me a printed form—one of a pile upon his desk.

I.....being.....years of age
Name
and single, do hereby take my solemn oath to remain in my present state of bachelorhood all my life for the consideration of.....dollars ($.....) to be paid me upon identification. For failure on my part to fulfill this contract I agree to forfeit the entire amount.

Signed Date

N. B.—The list of signatures will be published, and any breach of contract will be prosecuted.

I glanced up.

"I am alone in the city and without friends. Identification would be impossible. Perhaps in a few weeks——"

He cut me short. "You may take your own time. Do you accept?"

I hesitated a moment. "Yes," I said, and crossing over to the desk began filling in the blanks. As I finished and laid down the pen a door behind me opened softly. I swung round in the revolv-

ing chair and suddenly started to my feet. I was confronting an extremely pretty girl in a trim, business-like gray gown.

She paused a second on the threshold and then came a few steps forward, holding a sheaf of papers in her hand.

"Isabel, this is Mr. Smith," said the little man behind me. "Miss Smith is my stenographer," he added, parenthetically.

The girl flashed me a level glance from her gray eyes, inclining her head slightly in recognition of my bow. It was a glance to put a man instinctively on his mettle, and I drew myself up, conscious that she was taking revenge on me for the too explicit introduction of her employer.

Mr. Smith, however, seemed not at all disturbed, and, advancing, took the papers from her hand.

"You two will be thrown more or less together in your work," he explained. "That is" — turning inquiringly to me — "if I am fortunate enough to secure Mr. Smith's services as a private secretary. I shall need someone to assist me in this great scheme of mine for exterminating the Smiths. There will be references to be looked up and other details to be attended to. Would you accept the position if it were offered you?"

For a moment I was unable to comprehend the sudden good luck which was befalling me. Then I caught Miss Smith's eyes fixed expectantly upon my face.

"Yes," I stammered, "I should like the place."

The little man gave a quick nod of satisfaction.

"Then that is settled and I need not take more of your time this evening. We can arrange the details tomorrow morning — say at ten — if you will be so good."

He reached out and touched an electric button on the wall. Instantly the door flew open, revealing the footman's six feet of impersonality waiting to annex me. I bowed to my employer, to Miss Smith, and left the room.

Upon the bench in the hall a fresh consignment of Smiths sat waiting. They ran the scale of human frailty — from smug complacency to drowsy intoxication — and a whole battery of eyes inspected me with varying degrees of distrust and curiosity as I passed before them. Then the street door closed after me and I stood alone at the top of the flight of brownstone steps.

My one distinct recollection of the last half-hour was that Fortune, after a long eclipse, had smiled upon me — the vision of the goddess being hopelessly confused in my mind with that of a slender, lightly-poised figure in a business-like gray gown. But there was a touch of derision in the goddess' smile — and suddenly I understood. Had I not pledged my solemn word to remain a bachelor?

The following morning at ten I was definitely engaged as Mr. Smith's private secretary at a salary which, in comparison to my former poverty, meant wealth, although in reality it stood for little more than a roof over my head, a coat to my back, and a bare three meals a day. But I was content to work hard and steadily, and I was desperately anxious not to be turned adrift. Letters had come pouring in by the morning mail and I was set to work despatching the printed circulars which my employer had prepared in explanation of his scheme.

He had gone out for the day soon after my arrival, leaving me alone in the great library. I had been at work for possibly an hour, reading letters, sealing and directing envelopes, when there came a knock at the door, and in answer to my half-expectant "Come in," Miss Smith, the stenographer, appeared. She had been in my thoughts and dreams so constantly since the previous evening that this sudden materialization failed to startle me. She was pale and sleepless-looking and there was a plaintive little suggestion of fatigue in her manner as she closed the door after her and came forward to the desk.

"I know I'm interrupting," she said quickly, "but I am in great trouble — and you must help me."

I rose and offered her a chair.

"I shall be only too glad to do anything in my power," I said earnestly. "How can I be of use?"

She sat down on the edge of the chair, her hands lying idly in her lap, her eyes fixed uncertainly upon her interlacing fingers. She was even prettier than I remembered her and the unstudied pose emphasized subtly the girlish outlines of her perfectly modelled figure.

Suddenly she raised her eyes, and leaning forward spoke impulsively.

"You have not guessed, perhaps, that I am Mr. Smith's daughter."

I stared at her blankly, too astonished to reply.

"But it is quite true," she insisted. "It was one of my father's hobbies that I should be given a practical education so that, in case of his failure, I might be able to support myself. I have had every advantage which poverty can give."

The faint smile on her lips faded quickly.

'But you must have understood from what was said last night that my father was — not in his right mind. It is only within the last few days that I have suspected it — until then he has always been as sane as you or I. But the other night at dinner, without any warning, he suddenly began telling me of this great plan he had conceived for cornering the Smiths. It is ridiculous, of course, but it frightened me. He has never told me much of his affairs, but from the papers I know that last week, by a lucky turn in the market, he made millions. But he has been under a terrible strain for a long time past, and the sudden snapping of the tension has unbalanced his mind."

There were tears in her eyes, but she made no pretense of concealing them, and as she went on speaking her voice trembled slightly.

"My father has always been foolishly sensitive about our name, and now this idea of exterminating all the other Smiths has taken entire possession of him. There is no one — no relative, I mean — to whom I can go for help, except my brother Dick in Colorado. Yesterday I telegraphed him to come home at once, but he cannot reach here for two days, and until then, will you do what you can to help me? — to save us from the ridicule and notoriety into which we shall certainly be brought?"

She was looking at me imploringly, her lips slightly parted, her hands clasped tightly in her lap. Much of what she told me I had, of course, suspected on the previous evening when, alone in my lodging, the opportunity for sober thought had come to me. However, the chance of work had been too welcome for me to quarrel with it on any ground. But now I saw that my good fortune was to be short-lived.

"What do you suggest?" I asked. "I will do anything."

"Last night, when I saw how much confidence he seemed to place in you, I thought that if I could get you to talk with him, to show him how impossible his plan is, and how he will be cheated and taken advantage of by everyone, you might be able to persuade him to give it up or at least to wait and talk it over with Dick when he comes home. He won't listen to anything I say because he is firmly convinced a girl can never understand such things."

I shook my head skeptically.

"It won't be of any use," I objected, "but I'll try it — for your sake."

"Thank you," she said gravely. Then, rising, she held out her hand with a pretty air of hesitation. "Anything that you can do, my brother — and I — will not forget."

"But I sha'n't be able to do anything," I said, gloomily.

And it proved quite true. My employer was even more obstinate than I had feared. He was the typical monomaniac, armed at every point to defend his cherished plan, and he would listen to none of the objections which I brought forward. Many — in fact, most — of his arguments were inadequate and childishly absurd, but he clung to them tenaciously and with increasing vehemence until I saw the hopelessness of trying to make him realize his folly.

But Isabel's sympathy more than compensated me for the rather harsh treatment I had received at my employer's hands.

"Was he very fierce with you?" she whispered, intercepting me in the hall that evening as I was leaving at the close of my day's work.

I smiled in remembrance of the interview.

"It's to be war on the Smiths," I answered, "until they are as extinct as the Dodo. Your family will soon be the only specimens in captivity."

"Then he wouldn't listen?"

"Not for a moment. He gave me to understand he had cornered the market too often during his life-time to be afraid of sixty thousand Smiths."

Isabel frowned thoughtfully.

"We must take matters into our own hands," she said. "The servants understand, and have orders to turn everyone away. So far there has been no trouble, and if we can only keep it from

the papers everything may be all right — but there have been four reporters here this afternoon."

"Then we'll make a fight of it," I declared, "even if we have to barricade the doors against them."

But I had little idea how vigorous a defence would, in reality, be required. All the next day the siege continued, with Isabel and me on one side and the Great American Public on the other. During the hours my employer was at his downtown office, I received and pacified irate Smiths who, according to their own accounts, had tramped half across the continent, and now refused to be turned away without substantial satisfaction. At intervals, skirmish lines of reporters would storm the brownstone steps, only to be met and repulsed by the brass-buttoned stolidity of Vance, the butler, Isabel and I being stationed as reinforcements in the hall.

But that evening after dinner, while Mr. Smith still lingered at table finishing his cigar, the dreaded bomb burst within our very walls. Isabel swept into the library, an evening paper in her hand. A glance at her face warned me that what we feared had happened.

"What is it?" I asked, springing to my feet. She held up the paper before me silently, for she was on the verge of tears. I scanned the headlines quickly, and the one on the last column caught my eye.

THE SMITHS MUST GO.

STRANGE FREAK OF A MILLIONAIRE.

WILL SPEND HIS FORTUNE IN CORNERING A NAME.

"Then we're beaten!" I said grimly, staring at the derisive lines of type.

But before she could reply, there came the sharp thrill of the electric bell, and a moment later the sound of a low, amused laugh in the hall outside. Isabel turned just as the door opened and flung herself into the arms of a sunburnt, keen-eyed young fellow who appeared suddenly on the threshold.

"It's Dick!" she cried, clinging to him hysterically. "But he's come too late!"

There followed several minutes of tearful affection, gradually clearing into somewhat incoherent explanation, in the midst of which the young man stooped down and rescued the newspaper

from the floor. His hawk eyes swept over it at a glance, and then fastened upon the headline at the top of the last column.

"Is it true?" he asked sharply, glancing up at Isabel.

She nodded silently. Apparently there was danger of a fresh outburst of tears.

He read the article through deliberately, then tossed the paper on the desk.

"Come here, Sis," he commanded, and putting his arm about her shoulders, led her into the hall outside, closing the door after them.

For a long time I waited, scarcely making a pretense of work. A profound discouragement was stealing over me. I saw myself once more adrift, unable to find work, and with the memory of these last few days serving only as a background for my misery. It was not a cheerful future I was contemplating when Isabel returned.

"Dick is in the dining-room with father now," she said. "He's going to have a talk with him."

"He won't be able to convince him," I said doggedly.

She smiled.

"That's because you don't know Dick."

She was standing in the center of the room, her arms lifted, rearranging the disorder of her hair. I watched her miserably as she freed each comb, drew it through its heavy, silken wave and tucked it deftly into place.

When she had finished I rose reluctantly to my feet.

"There is nothing more that I can do," I said, "Mr. Smith will probably have no further need of me."

She looked up quickly.

"But surely you are not going without seeing my father and Dick again?"

"I will come in the morning for my dismissal. Good-bye," I said, holding out my hand. I realized that in instant flight lay my one chance of preserving the secret which I had no right to tell. But she had come forward and had laid her hand lightly on my arm.

"You have been so kind to me," she pleaded, "why must it be 'good-bye?'"

She was only making it harder for me to leave her, and a sudden senseless anger took possession of me.

"Because I am poor, with neither friends nor money, and I must earn a living if I can."

I walked blindly toward the door.

"I am not afraid of being poor," faltered a voice behind me — a small voice that would scarcely have been audible save in the perfect stillness of the great room.

I paused.

"And — you know I've been brought up to be a poor man's wife."

All my resolution was swept suddenly away. I turned and met her eyes.

"You could hardly find a poorer man," I said truthfully, "but — Isabel, will you marry me?"

The hall door opened gently, and I faced about, to find my employer standing on the threshold. His face was grave and his manner very dignified.

"You may send word to the papers to discontinue my advertisement," he said. "I have concluded to abandon my great scheme of cornering the Smiths. It would be quite useless, as my son informs me he will never marry, so our branch of the family will become extinct. When you have attended to the winding up of the affair, I shall be pleased to retain your services in another capacity at an increase of salary."

He bowed slightly and withdrew.

For a moment both Isabel and I were too amazed to speak.

"He's cured!" she breathed at last, with a long sigh of relief. "It's the shock of seeing Dick again."

I crossed over to the hearth-rug where she was standing, and caught her hand.

"Then you can answer the question that I asked."

She looked up at me, smiling.

"If I'll marry you, you mean? I'm afraid it's quite impossible." She brought her free hand from where it had been half hidden in the folds of her gown, and held it out to me. It contained a crumpled paper. I took it from her, and smoothing it out recognized at a glance my agreement to remain a bachelor.

"Where did you find it?" I asked, laughing to cover my discomfiture.

"On the desk that first night after you were here. I took it because I thought you might like to be reminded of it — sometime."

"But it was signed before I ever saw you. I shall ask your father to release me, for the money was never paid."

Isabel shook her head mockingly.

"But I'm afraid he never will. You see, it was always planned that I should marry a 'Montmorency' or some other equally aristocratic name. Father will never consent to my staying just a 'Smith.'"

I tore the paper thoughtfully into bits and dropped them in the fire. Then I took her hands.

"I want to confess something," I said gravely. "You remember the evening when I came here I was starving, and almost desperate ——"

"Yes, yes, I know," she interrupted quickly, laying her cheek against my coat.

"Well — it was beastly of me, dear, I know — you see my name wasn't really 'Smith' at all!"

She shrank back; then her face lit suddenly with hope.

"Is it Montmoren ——?"

I drew her to me and kissed her tenderly.

"Try to be brave, sweetheart," I whispered. "It — it's *'Jones'!*"

The Twelfth Taper.*

BY DON MARK LEMON.

P to the very completion of the building there was a mystery about it that grew as the building grew. The artisans had simply followed the blue-prints, and those plans did not state to what use the edifice would be put. The contractor knew no more than what the blue-prints told him. The architect was unknown. When the building was completed it proved to be one story in height, circular in form, windowless, but of chaste beauty. It stood apart just without the city limits on an acre of walled ground. Not far from it were other handsome structures, for several art and music clubs, acting in harmony while land prices were not yet exorbitant, had erected their halls in the neighborhood, in anticipation of the city's growth.

No lettering appeared on the edifice and no date, nor any visible sign or figure that offered a clue to what use the building would or might be applied.

When it was completed and the last artificer had taken his leave, a gentleman carefully inspected the interior of the structure, then locked its handsome doors, and with one backward, prophetic look of sorrow, went his way, and the building stood untenanted and unentered, in mysterious silence and beauty. Neither life nor death passed through its doors; and the curious wondered in vain.

It was an evening in June, a year later, when this gentleman who had been the last to leave the building returned. He unlocked and opened the heavy bronze doors, and one by one, perhaps three or four minutes apart, twelve men followed him into the precincts of the hall. Each bore in his hand a case of different shape and dimensions, and moved in silence, as toward some solemn rite.

These twelve men were seated in a body at the upper end of the building, distinguishable by no light save the glow cast by one

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rose-colored chandelier suspended high above, and the faint, far gleam of the moon that came through the symbolically-designed skylight of stained glass overgrilled with a splendid golden lyre.

A carriage now drove up through the grounds to the marble steps, and a young woman was tenderly lifted out and carried within, and the doors were locked fast.

They placed the beautiful girl upon a couch awaiting her drooping, pallid form, and the gentleman who was the moving spirit of the occasion seated himself close beside.

A few moments passed, then a flash of music, like the breaking of a warm wave of light — for so strange and beautiful the harmony was — arose from that part of the hall where the twelve musicians were gathered, and grew and spread in indescribable sweetness throughout the resonant space.

The eyes of the young girl now opened, and through their purple depths she seemed to drink in the rich harmony, and her lips fell apart as if her soul would escape and take flight on the wings of the ever-ascending spirit of sound.

Awhile this continued, then, at a sign from the gentleman seated by the couch, the music ceased, and silently each musician bent forward and lighted a little waxen taper affixed to his music rack, and at the same moment the rose-colored light above faded and went out.

In the faint crimson moonlight that came through the stained glass and golden lyre the twelve tapers shone like twelve tiny, fitful spirits, and now began to stir with the pulsing of such music as the ears of the dying had never before heard. Under the guidance of the gifted leader the notes rose and fell as to the beat of a seraphic wand; they seemed to open like flowers, expanding and giving fragrance, and died away as softly and exquisitely as a rose closing back to a bud again.

Awhile this continued, the girl smiling faintly under the spell of the perfect harmony, as if she felt on her forehead the palpable touch of a seraphic hand. Then one of the twelve musicians extinguished his taper, arose, and stole away from his companions, treading softly, as if he feared to wake some sleeper.

A moment later another taper was blown out, and another musician silently stole away to the rear of the orchestra.

Then, one by one, nine of the remaining tapers were extinguished by a breath, and one by one nine of the remaining musicians arose and softly stole away, and there remained but one lighted taper and one musician, playing on a violin that seemed strung with the living heart-strings of a lover.

Now the eyes of the recumbent young girl opened wide and looked up as at a face bending over her, and the sweet, pallid lips parted with an unspoken word; then the soft-fringed eyelids closed, the golden head sank back deeper on the pillow and moved no more, and as a sigh of poignant anguish broke from the heart of the man bending over the couch, the last musician leaned forward and blew out the twelfth taper and stole away, and the music ceased, a drifting cloud obscured the moon, and the wide hall was left to darkness and death and grief unutterable.

. . . . . .

She seemed another Saint Cecilia, so lovely in person and so musical in spirit, and while still a child the foremost masters of Europe prophesied for her a career as one of the world's greatest musicians. Her powers matured with her mind, and at seventeen her genius was, perhaps, without a parallel; then her health suddenly failed, and it was found too late that her great gifts were in vain.

Her ailment left no chance of recovery, and her physicians gave her at the most but two years to live.

When at last they told her the truth, she expressed the wish that she might die while listening to the sweet sounds of orchestral music. Her life had been devoted to music; it was fitting that her death should be. And she would feel happier so to die.

The man who loved her, and whom she was to have wed, promised that her wish should be fulfilled, and it was he who had bent over her as her life went out with the twelfth taper.

In the center of the beautiful marble mausoleum — for such the mysterious building was — the body of this gifted and lovely girl was laid to eternal rest.

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If your mental and physical machinery does not work smoothly, it may or may not be the coffee.

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Try quitting 10 days and see the result.

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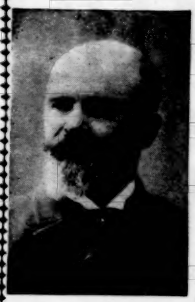

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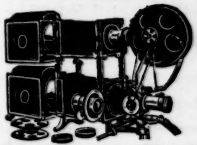

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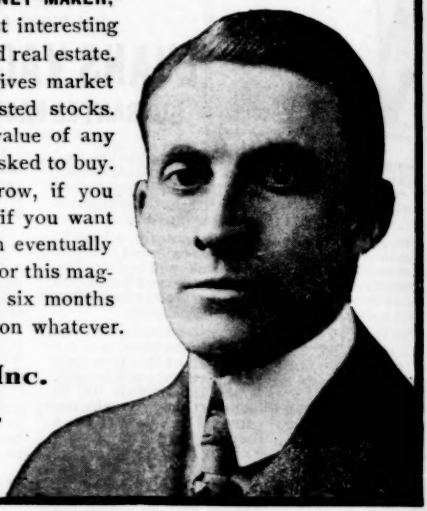

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AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE FOR JUNE

The feature of the June number of AINSLEE'S is the concluding instalment of "Mr. and Mrs. NEVILL TYSON," the remarkable story by

May Sinclair

Author of

"The Divine Fire."

The novelette is a fascinating story with the rich coloring of Creole life in New Orleans. It is entitled

"Made in Heaven,"

and its author is Vincent Harper.

The June number will also contain the second in the series of racing stories by

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The list of short stories, more absorbingly interesting than ever, includes tales by CAROLINE DUER, RICHARD W. CHILD, FRANCES WILSON, FREDERICK G. FASSETT, and PARKER L. WALTER. Two brilliant essays by MARY MANNERS and ROBERT STEWART effectively supplement the fiction.

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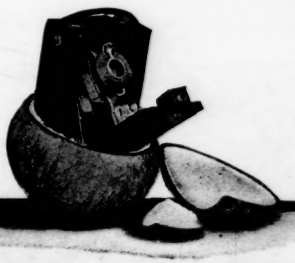

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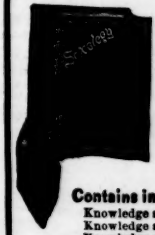

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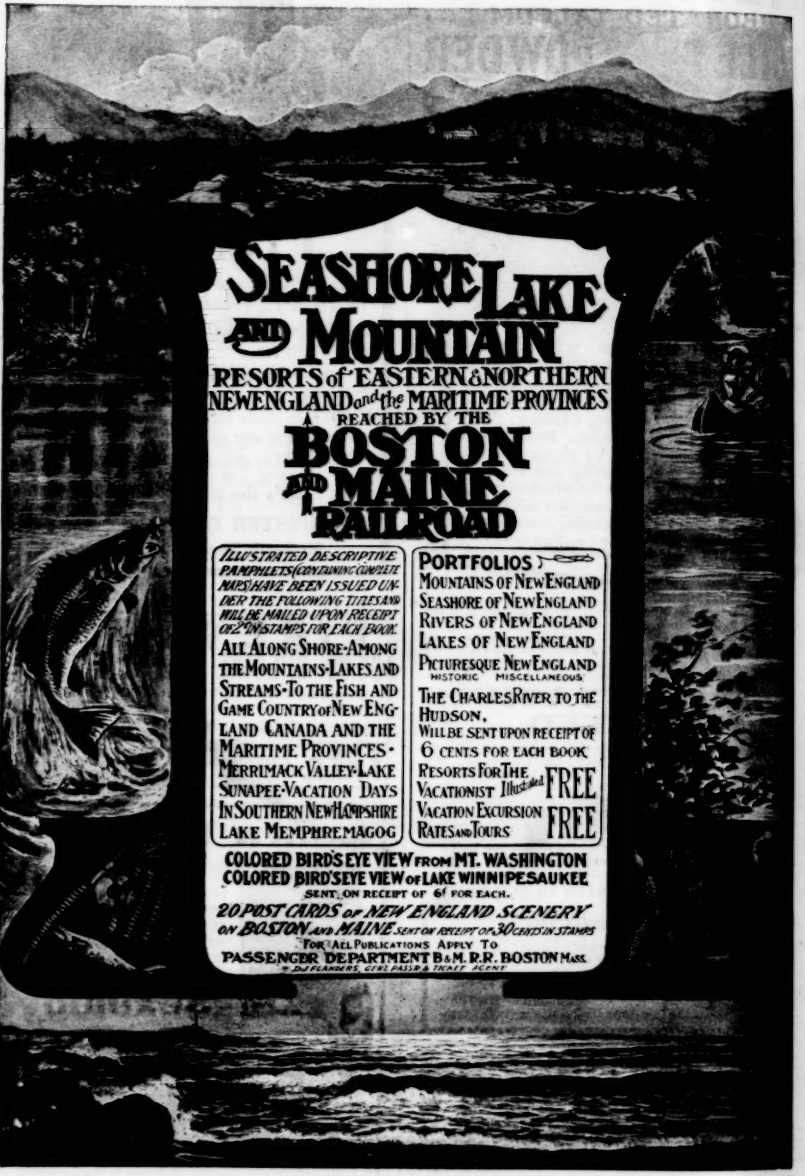
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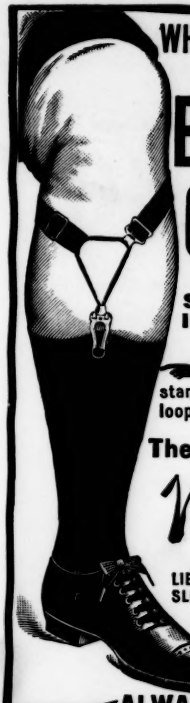

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